

The Cincinnati Art Museum Bulletin



MARCH 1953



*Hand of Buddha, T'ang
Dynasty, 618-907 A.D., caves
of Lung-Men, China,
limestone with paint, H. 24"
60 cm., accessions number
1952.109.*

FIVE BUDDHIST SCULPTURES

The oldest of the Museum's five recently acquired Buddhist sculptures comes, appropriately enough, from India, the homeland of Buddhism. It comes too from the classical culmination of Indian Buddhist art which flowered in the region between the Kistna and Godveri rivers in what is now the Madras Presidency. It is a strategic location for the control of the Deccan, as the peninsula proper of the Indian sub-continent is called, and for about five hundred years at the turn of the era powerful Andhra kings of this region ruled the whole of India south of the Ganges. From its coast on the Bay of Bengal Buddhism and its art crossed to Burma.

While *Saka* and *Hiung-nu*, Scythians and Huns to western historians, harried the north, the kings of the Andhra Dynasty filled their home province with a series of large brick and stone-encased circular mounds called *stupas*. The latest and finest of them was at Amaravati which has given its name to the style of the whole period. The Amaravati *stupa* survived till the XVIII century when a local Indian governor began using it as a quarry for building stone. In 1797 Colonel Mackenzie of the East India Company saw the ruins and managed to preserve the remaining sculptured fragments for what is now the Central Museum in Madras and, of course, the British Museum. Other fragments from the region can be seen in the oriental museum of Paris, the Musée Guimet. The Cincinnati relief is one of the finest among the few in America.

It is carved with a skilled and sensuous touch in low relief from the greenish white marble of the Deccan, still carrying the sizing and bright color, predominantly red in this case, with which all Amaravati, in fact all ancient sculpture, was painted. It could have come from either the marble revetment of the mound's basement course or from a member of the huge *vedika*, a marble post and rail fence surrounding the *stupa*. The *vedika* at Amaravati stood thirteen to fourteen feet high and all its parts, upright columns and transverse rails, were richly carved with illustrations of the Buddhist legend. Some of them show the Buddha in human form, while others of the same time, like the Museum's relief, acknowledge his spiritual nature by depicting him symbolically, as a throne, a column, or the Bo tree of his meditation.

Here the Buddha's footprints on a footstool most actively suggest his human presence while on the empty throne a circular cushion crossed with a curving swastika probably symbolises his universal presence. Above it a flaming column rises to an ornate capital. The *Princely Companions of the Buddha* stand or kneel in attendance. Couchant deer at the throne's corners symbolise the life of the



spirit and possibly refer to the Deer Park at Benares where the Buddha first publicly taught. Other *Princely Companions* ride horse-like lions recalling the Buddha's epithet, *Lion of the Cakyas*.

While Amaravati style was reaching its climax in the late II and early III centuries A.D., the date of the Museum's relief, Buddhism was spreading through farther Asia. By the V century Buddhist China was producing great sculpture, in great quantities, very little of which has survived. There was an early-morning zeal in the air of China's first Buddhist period, typified by the Emperor Wen Kung who ruled the Northern Ch'i from 565 to 575 A.D. He neglected affairs of state, especially military affairs with the result that his dynasty fell in 577, to go about with a beggar's bowl raising money for Buddhist monasteries and their sculptural adornment. It was a successful fund-raising device, not unknown in later days, since to give to the emperor's monasteries was a tactful approach to the emperor's favor, and could at least do no spiritual harm. Under such auspices Northern Ch'i sculpture flourished, as shown by the Museum's two new white marble *bodhisattvas*. The eminent Swedish Sinologist, Osvald Sirén, identifies them as Kwanyin, recognisable by the Buddha figure on its headdress, and Ta Shih-chih whose elaborate headdress bears a sacred urn, or *cintamani*, symbol of spiritual enlightenment. They are attendant figures to a slightly larger sculpture of the *Amitabha* Buddha, Lord of the Western Paradise, now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Their bases, rare survivals from so early a time, are the same type as the base of the Metropolitan's figure, a frieze of lotus stems surrounding an inverted lotus bloom with a socket to hold the figure. An inscription on the larger base records that all three of them were made, probably in western Hopei, and unveiled in "*the sixth year of Wu P'ing era of the Great Ch'i dynasty . . . on the eighth day of the fourth month (May 3, 575) by Sung ssu-ching and Chao Pao, adjutants on the board of armaments in Jen-chou, for his Imperial Majesty, the Imperial family, the prime minister, their fathers and mothers, and all living beings most respectfully, of white stone, in order that they may all receive the benefits of the Noble Way and thus become illuminated. The patrons of the statue were the pacifier of the South, general Po Jen with his good wife Chu, and the pacifier of Po (in Shantung) general Han Ning with his mother and wife Sun. The master presiding at the giving light (the unveiling) was the abbot Tao-hsun and his mother Yuan . . .*" The phrasing may be quaint but the social institution is familiar: army and church dignitaries endorsing the immemorial gesture of a courtier. And who can say that its piety was impaired if a little worldly credit was established? Certainly the stocky column-like figures and the serene heads have a spiritual authority of their own, enhanced by the delicately carved ornament of chains, necklaces and buckles.

Amaravati Relief, late II to early III century A.D., India, greenish white marble with red sizing, H. 20½" 51.25 cm., W. 13½" 33.75 cm., accessions number 1952.187.

Still nobler not only in its colossal size but in the mute eloquence of its form is the stone hand holding a lotus bud from Lung-Men. It too is probably the attribute of a *bodhisattva*, attendant on a larger figure of the Buddha. Scholars argue whether it dates from the T'ang Dynasty or the Wei Dynasty when the caves of Lung-Men were first carved into a vast Buddhist pantheon, earlier even than 495 A.D. This was the year the Wei capital was moved from An-yang in northern Honan to Lo-yang across the Yellow River in southern Honan. Lung-Men lies about twelve miles south of Lo-yang and its grotto walls are a peculiarly dense black limestone sometimes called marble. T'ang rulers such as Kao Tsung, 650 to 683, and the Empress Wu, 690 to 704, continued immense carving projects at Lung-Men. The largest figure of them all, a *Vairocana* Buddha, Lord of the Central Universe, over fifty feet high, in Cave XIX, dates from this time.

Wei Dynasty sculptors had a sense of monumental scale but not the quality of majesty this hand, fragment though it is, proclaims. Its naturalism, potential force rather than relaxed grace, is the hallmark of the imperial T'ang Dynasty.

The monumentality of tropical Buddhism lies in the total effect of the *stupas* rising from the ancient volcanic crater which is the Dieng plateau of central Java, not that individual details lack in dignity. Borobudur is the greatest of these temple mounds, and like all *stupas* represents the cosmos in miniature. The pilgrim winds his way along the three sculptured miles of Borobudur's ascent, passing the pleasures of the material world to be introduced to religious realities as the life of the Buddha unfolds. He finally reaches the one hundred and fifty foot summit where the major shrines of the *Dhyani* Buddhas cluster around the central shrine. Life-sized *Dhyani* Buddhas, rulers of the elements and the four quarters of heaven, are interspersed along the sculptured journey. Few of man's artistic endeavors even approach the overwhelming drama of Borobudur. Some hint of this grandeur and of the singular character of Buddhist art in Java of the VIII and IX century Sailendra period can be gleaned from the Museum's head of a *Dhyani* Buddha, cut from the volcanic stone of Borobudur and torn from its niche on the sacred pilgrimage.

PHILIP R. ADAMS

Information on the five sculptures comes from many sources, chiefly, in the case of the Amaravati relief, from "Ancient India," K. de B. Codrington, London, 1926 and "The Sculpture of Greater India," an exhibition catalog with text by John Pope, New York, 1942, which was also helpful with the head from Borobudur. The Northern Ch'i *bodhisattvas* were published by Sirén in "Bulletin No. 12 of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm," 1940, pl. I, a and b, pp. 474-478. Light was thrown on the dating of the T'ang hand by "Chinese Sculpture in the Metropolitan Museum of Art," Alan Priest, New York, 1944, and the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* is always valuable, in this case the article on Java.

Right:
Bodhisattva, Northern Ch'i
Dynasty, 565-575 A.D.,
Northern Honan, China,
marble with paint, H. 69"
172.5 cm., accessions
number 1952.111.



Dhyani Buddha, VIII to IX
century A.D., Borobudur,
Java, volcanic stone, H. 13"
32.5 cm., accessions
number 1952.113.



RANDOM NOTES ON CHINESE PAINTING

It would be hard to imagine anything much farther removed from the daily round of mechanised life in the Ohio valley than the subtleties of Chinese painting. Or so it would seem at first glance. Yet anyone who has ever celebrated the mysteries of the seasons in his private heart, no matter how city-bound or inarticulate he may be, is in tune with the poet-painters of China. And who has not at some time or other remarked the spring's first green with fresh recognition, or paused an idle moment to watch a bird outside his window, or the haze of autumn on the river hills? There may be some unfortunates who have never heard the hush of snow, but they are cut off from communion with all poets and all painters everywhere, and can only be pitied. Surely there aren't many such, and all others are most intimately acquainted with the stuff of Chinese painting. Because it is simply that, fortified by an unfailing and sympathetic knowledge of the human kind. Except that the Chinese masters, being poets and painters par excellence, look deeper than most into these familiar things.

Consider Chou Ch'en's eternal fisherman, wading through rasping reeds in the rank dawn to catch bait-minnows. One is obviously wriggling in his hand. He hardly needs the poem added by the contemporary Ming scholar Ch'en Chi-ju who writes:

*Bringing a ewer of wine
Sitting down and fishing beside a rapid current,
It is easy to buy the creek
But difficult to get the fish.
Good things of the world are not necessarily acquired at once,
The three-foot fish touches your line very late.*

The translator of this pithy comment on a timeless phenomenon is Mr. Hugo Munsterberg, the noted oriental scholar of Michigan State College, who has recently published an article in the *ART QUARTERLY*, Winter 1952, on "The Collection of Chinese Paintings in the Cincinnati Art Museum." Mr. Munsterberg congratulates the Museum on having "availed itself of what may well prove the last opportunity in years to form a significant collection of Chinese painting. . . . All the main genres which the Chinese have traditionally admired—landscape, figure and portrait, bird and flower, and bamboo painting, are well represented

so that this small but choice group of scrolls will offer the people of Cincinnati a fine opportunity to become acquainted with the artistic conventions and the beauty of Chinese painting and calligraphy." He then proceeds to discuss the paintings in detail, beginning with "The Four Sages of Shang Shan" by the early XIII century master Ma Yüan.

This astonishing masterpiece is almost too heady a beginning for even the well-intentioned amateur. The Chinese have always considered Ma Yüan one of their greatest masters yet only a handful of his paintings has survived. "The Four Sages of Shang Shan" is the best documented of them and carries no less than thirty-nine colophons, or appended comments, by some of the foremost Chinese poets and scholars including the famous Yüan Dynasty painter Ni Tsan. The first two colophons, on the painting itself, are by the XVIII century emperor Ch'ien Lung, collector, connoisseur and expansionist monarch who clashed with Russian imperialism in the depths of central Asia. The scroll was taken into Manchuria by the last Chinese emperor, T'ung Hsüan who became the Japanese puppet Henry Pu Yi.

A half-hour's reading of the colophons, ably translated by Mr. Achilles Fang of Harvard, opens up endless vistas of Chinese history, philosophy, political science and poetry. The subject has to do with a, to the Chinese, well-known incident in the establishment of the Han Dynasty in the II century B.C., and one of the four sages is remembered for a short classical poem relative to the subject. It is as if an incident in the rivalry between Mark Antony and Augustus, which affected the founding of the Julian Dynasty in Rome, had involved Horace, who wrote a short verse concerning it. The incident and the poem were known to all Latin-speaking scholars of the Middle Ages. Now suppose that Giotto painted an illustration of it in the late XIII century and Dante appended a rhymed comment, setting the verse pattern for Petrarch and Lorenzo de Medici who follow. Dante's verse was lost, as Ch'ien Lung deplores the absence of Yang Tsai's poem and leaves its space blank, though Mr. Fang has supplied the poem from Yang Tsai's collected works. Ronsard, Cardinal Bembo and Erasmus among others add comments followed by Sir Philip Sidney, Bacon and Spenser. China after all is a continent as large and various as Europe. Suppose, too, that a well-known and literate painter such as Rafael, who is said to have written sonnets, adds his verse, in his own autograph as have all the others. Then in the XVIII century a powerful and knowledgeable monarch, Frederick the Great, for example, comes into proud possession of the painting, has his curators catalogue it for the royal library at Potsdam, and adds an extended commentary on questions of statecraft the subject raises, together with a short lyric in praise of the painting. It would have to be after the break with Voltaire because Frederick, Ch'ien Lung, sounds a lit-

tle irritated with scholars. The last of the Hohenzollerns carries it into exile and is forced to put it up as security for a loan. Thus it comes on the market and is bought by a Japanese museum. The average Japanese could hardly be expected to grasp the stupendous associations of the painting and its poems, but being an intelligent person he might use it as a key to unlock the treasure house of western culture. No proper scholar would allow himself so free-wheeling an analogy, but it is surprisingly direct and does suggest the treasure of Chinese thought and history waiting in this masterpiece for the intelligent observer.

For one thing the calligraphy alone can be a delight. Always thought by the Chinese themselves to be their greatest art, the beautiful writing, which is what calligraphy literally means, is still so close to picture-writing that Chinese painting often seems to be an extension of Chinese poetry and vice versa. Scholars were competing with each other's writing styles in the colophons, sometimes competing even with the painter, demonstrating the whole range of personal touch and manual grace. Joan Miró, the modern Parisian master, was fascinated with the calligraphy of the Museum's scrolls on a recent visit to Cincinnati, and has insisted that examples be included in a documentary film now being made on his current painting.

Chao Mêng-fu, whose "Landscape with Twin Pine-Trees" is one of the Museum's finest scrolls, was known to his Yüan Dynasty contemporaries primarily as a calligrapher. Incidentally his wife, the Lady Kuan Tao-shêng, was the first Chinese woman painter on record. He was a late Sung master who chose to collaborate with the Mongols, becoming war minister to Kublai Khan. His teacher and friend Ch'ien Hsüan, of the "Doves and Pear Blossoms," refused to collaborate and broke with Chao Mêng-fu over the issue. The "Twin Pine-Trees" immediately suggests a watercolor or drawing by Cézanne. And it is precisely in their drawings, their intense and private notations, that the western masters come closest to the Chinese. The wash drawings of Claude, or Giorgione, of Delacroix, and especially of Rembrandt, made long before the final painting was developed, possibly vulgarised as Paul Valéry would have it, for public exhibition, are near indeed to the vivid instant of Chinese sight.

There was nothing public in the Chinese painter's intention. A Chinese collector would look at his prized possession a few times only in the course of a year, and then in the seclusion of his garden or his study. He would take the scroll from its brocade wrapper, loosen the jade clasp, and then after its prelude of rich mounting look at it section by section, rarely more than a foot or eighteen inches at a time. If a visitor were worthy of the painting he too might be allowed to see it in this intimate and consecutive fashion. The physical and social nature of a western museum simply does not permit a reconstruction of this legitimately dramatic element in the seeing of Chinese paintings. The Museum does its best by

showing the whole scroll with all its colophons so that a visitor walking slowly along it and focussing his attention on one part at a time may possibly approximate, not recreate, the conditions in which it was meant to be seen.

Only one of the Museum's ten paintings carries at a distance. Consequently Chu Ta's "Lotus Pond with Birds" is so placed that it can be seen through three small galleries. This not altogether Chinese virtue may be the result of a western influence which was fairly strong in Ming China and was to grow stronger in the succeeding Ch'ing Dynasty of the Manchus. Chu Ta was a cousin of the last Ming emperor—the polygamous court produced quantities of cousins—and in the ancient Chinese fashion withdrew from collaboration with the Manchus to a

"Lotus Pond with Birds,"
(detail), by Chu Ta
(Pa-ta Shen-jen), China,
active 1630-1650 A.D.,
ink on paper, accessions
number 1950.79.



monastery where he posed as a drunkard and mild lunatic, doubtless to secure a little privacy. It was an effective device, and certainly no more than a device, for no alcoholic hand brushed in the bold blacks and grays of the "Lotus Pond" with its tiny birds all air and feathers, and no madman wrote the cryptic but memorable quatrain in its lower lefthand corner.

*When I see the bitter heart of a lotus seed
I note that for its staying and its going both the lotus needs its root.*

*Split the lotus seed-case by the River Jo-yeh though you will
In a painting the lotus is still a gentleman.*

(freely rendered by the writer from Achilles Fang's translation)

Of all the poems grafted on or growing out of the Museum's paintings the thirteen colophons of Ch'ien Hsüan's "Doves and Pear Blossoms" are the most intentionally lyric. Twelve poets over a hundred-and-fifty-year span combined to make the series, yet it is as strictly composed as Brahms' "Variations on a Theme of Haydn." Such is the unity of feeling in a long-established and unself-

"Doves and Pear Blossoms,"
(detail), by Ch'ien Hsüan,
China, born 1235 A.D.,
ink on paper, accessions
number 1948.80.

conscious civilisation. Every one of them refers to the doves and snow-like pear blossom, and the third verse introduces a second theme of Spring-Festivals, charmingly onomatopoeic in the Chinese words *Ch'ing Ming*. Five and six repeat it while the ninth verse mentions it for the last time together with the western garden of Tung-lan, first introduced in the seventh verse. After a calm assertion of the "kindness of things" in the eleventh verse the series ends on a note of gentle and inevitable resignation. There was nothing more that anyone could add.



1.

Like a shimmer of bird calls
the petals of the pear-flower drift
through late clear air,

already since the morning rain
the blossoms have grown older.

So does the pear-branch, snow-perfumed,
hold a bright mirror up to man.

Meng Hsien-weng, born 1227

2.

Again the snow-scented air
calls me from dreams,
and again the doves on a branch in my small courtyard
swell their chests with Spring,

a bird whistles up the rain,
and in the instant
I feel the weary tissue of the old sad world
begin to smile.

K'o Chiu-ssu, born 1312

3.

Spring-Festivals will start to-morrow
but now on a still hour between wind and rain
the branch blooms white as snow.

A pair of doves has gentled to it,
they do not even sway in the calm
knowing their happiness more deeply, and their oneness.

Here is a cure for sighing in the long years to come.

Pao Hsun, born 1335

4.

It is no discredit to the old General
that Ch'ien Hsüan paints as well as he.

I know these turtle-doves together on a flowering branch,
joined by the painter's brush through sun or rain forever,
are pleasant in my heart.

Ch'ien Liang-yu, born 1278

5.

At Spring-Festivals time the pear-flowers bloom
and doves, Spring-paired, sport through the blossom
shouting about the fine day, chasing a cuckoo
or, touchy in the tense air before rain, scolding their mates.

All this the painter's sure eye notes
as he stands too quiet to be seen, holding the branch
and wishing fair days, mild winds always for the pear-flowers.

Will you not join the painter in his gracious thoughts
finding some pleasure there?

Chang Wen Tsai

6.

One branch, I remember, was so bright with snow
it seemed to flash a light on me,
and I remember the shrill gossip of doves.
It was last year, when the Spring-Festivals were over.

So now on waking, and remembering, I raise the curtain,
the rain has stopped and the sky begins to clear.

Sun Hua

7.

There is no dust on Ch'ien Hsüan's brush
he merely plies it leisurely, as the snow lay
when he painted the garden of Tung-lan,
easily, as where here two amorous doves
flutter to a branch of Spring.

But the dew, crisp-drying on the snow-sweet bough,
is harsh to the doves' feet.

It was good of Ch'ien to sign his painting,
otherwise you'd think you looked into your own deep garden
through a window, after rain.

Sun Hsin

8.

How admirable the skillful brush that sets a pair of doves
here on a fragrant branch, snow-covered, from Tung-lan.

Better than any scholar's goose-quill pen and smoothened silk
the painter's brush-stroke tells the changing manners of his time.

Sha Shen Ts'un

9.

This is a fancy of the brush,
this elegance of doves enchanted on a Spring branch,
of willows that dare not call the rain to break a spell
that holds even the clouds motionless:

I remember how at Tung-lan during Spring-Festivals
the doves fought all day long, sifting the flowers over me
till I looked like a beggar sleeping in the snow.
But who can quarrel with an artist?

Sun Hsin, again

10.

The slight rain mists through a mist of pear-bloom,
slightly it glistens on the feathered sheen
of doves together on their dreaming branch,
softly it sheds a scented snow of petals through the night.

Now in the dawn the doves stir and preen.
Who comes, startling the garden?
But the doves are not frightened
they do not fly away.

Chang T'ien-ying

11.

The seasons change
and the weather changes from sun to rain,
but the kindness of things does not change:

see, from a little distance,
how this flowered branch
looks like a child's back:

see how the painting with its pair of doves
is a memory of Spring
brimming from the storehouse of the painter's eye.

Lin Fu Feng

12.

Spring branch of pear-flower, whiteness of snow,
pure air taut with fragrance,
splendid wings of birds upraised in anger,
sharp cry of birds, shower of petals,

dawn, and the hour of rising
and in the seeing, sadness.

Men Tsou Liang

13.

The day ends, the liquid doves are hushed,
but still where a lonely couple has sheltered
the pear-bloom mantles the branch with snow.

Let it be quiet yet a while
under the Spring clouds,
darkness will come.

Ch'iu Ta Yu

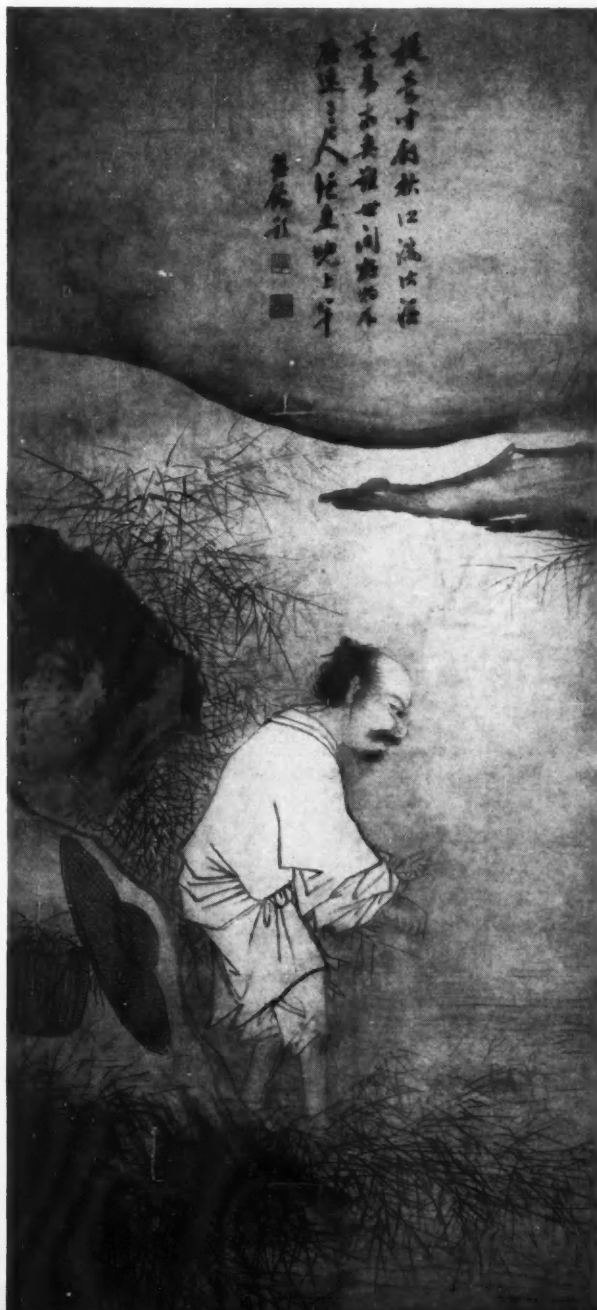
*(freely rendered into verse by the writer
from a translation by Mr. Yusen Shen)*

Fortunately for the variety and color of
human experience East continues to be
East and West continues to be West,
but happily in these approachable
paintings the twain meet oftener and
more pleasantly than Mr. Kipling assumed.

PHILIP R. ADAMS



*"Fishing," by Chou Ch'ên,
China, active about 1500 to
1535 A.D., ink on paper,
accessions number 1948.84.*



*"The Four Sages of Shang
Shan," (detail), by
Ma Yüan, China, active
about 1190-1224 A.D.,
ink on paper, accessions
number 1950.77.*

*Bodhisattva, Northern Ch'i
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